

**NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORKS**

**March 23, 2004**

**Monthly Conference Call**

**IMPELLING TO ACTION: INCREASING RESIDENT PARTICIPATION**

Operator: Good afternoon. My name is Tina and I will be your conference facilitator today. At this time I would like to welcome everyone to the Neighborhood Networks March 23<sup>rd</sup> Conference Call, "Impelling to Action: Increasing Resident Participation." All lines have been placed on mute to prevent any background noise.

After the speakers' remarks, there will be a question and answer period. If you would like to ask a question during this time, simply press star, then the number one on your telephone keypad. If you would like to withdraw your question, press star, then the number two on your telephone keypad. Thank you. Ms. Schachter, you may begin your conference.

Ms. Schachter: Thank you, Tina. Good afternoon and welcome to the March 23<sup>rd</sup> Neighborhood Networks Conference Call, "Impelling to Action: Increasing Resident Participation." Before I introduce our three speakers, I would like to remind participants that a verbatim transcript and audio of this call will be posted to the Neighborhood Network's website within two weeks. The Neighborhood Network's website address is [www.neighborhoodnetworks.org](http://www.neighborhoodnetworks.org). I would also like to take this opportunity to remind Multifamily Neighborhood Networks center listeners that resident participation is the most critical element to operating a successful and effective Neighborhood Networks center. Multifamily Neighborhood Networks center callers should know that the strategic tracking and reporting tool, known as START, contains resource materials to help survey resident interests and needs, as well as information on developing an internal marketing plan. If you have questions about START, resident surveys, internal marketing or anything else, please call the Neighborhood Networks Information Center at 888-312-2743. Now I'd like to introduce our speakers. Bandana Shrestha, Sharon Glenn and Kimberly Timms.

Bandana Shrestha is the Director of Model Programs and Partnerships at The Points of Light Foundation. Bandana is responsible for carrying out the strategies for the foundation's family strengthening and neighborhood transformation initiative supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. She has a B.A. degree in English from Linfield College, and a Masters in Fine Arts from the University of Oregon. Before joining the foundation, Bandana worked with U.S. and international nonprofit organizations focused on sustainable development, community empowerment, capacity building, and gender issues. Bandana's

presentation will be followed by that of Sharon Glenn, who I am pleased to say, is my colleague.

Sharon Glenn, technical assistance manager for the Neighborhood Networks initiative, facilitates processes throughout the nation to Neighborhood Network centers receiving comprehensive technical assistance on community development. With a focus on low to moderate income multifamily housing, she works with HUD representatives, property owners and managers, and other center stakeholders to unite outside resources and opportunities with those who live within economically challenged communities. Sharon has worked with nonprofit organizations and community leaders to leverage resources, property owners and managers to invest in the Neighborhood Network centers, and residents to gain skills and knowledge that lead to government independence and self-sufficiency. Whether working with rural or inner city communities, Sharon's goal remains constant in helping to create sustainable community building solutions.

Our third and final speaker is actually our linchpin for this conference call. Kimberly Timms is the Center Director for Oasis Neighborhood Network Center in Fort Worth, Texas. She is a native of Fort Worth and a very, very busy person. She is the mother of four, and also has experience in advertising, special sales and promotion for print and broadcast media. She's an experienced youth counselor as well.

I would now like to turn the conference call over to Bandana Shrestha.

Ms. Shrestha:

Thank you, Vickie. And it's such a pleasure to have this opportunity to speak with all of you today. As Vickie mentioned, my name is Bandana. I am with The Points of Light Foundation and I manage the Family Strengthening Neighborhood Transformation initiative, which is funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. And what I have to share today on our topic of "Impelling to Action: Increasing Resident Participation" comes from the work we have done in this arena. For those of you who don't know what The Points of Life Foundation is about, we are all about volunteering and increasing volunteering across the nation. We work with various partners, including our primary partners that are volunteer centers, and we're proud to say that we're partnering also, beginning to partner with and strengthen our relationship with

Neighborhood Network centers, and today is a great example of that.

The Points of Light Foundation seeks to engage more people and resources in volunteer service to address serious social problems, and is funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. We have done some work around engaging volunteers and residents of low-income communities in community action. And I'm hoping to share this knowledge today.

One of the first things that I would like to put forth is a question as to why reach out to residents, why is participation important? And as our facilitator/moderator has already established, resident participation is one of the fundamental issues in the success of Neighborhood Network centers across the country. Obviously that's something that you are all familiar with. Whether we are talking about building ownership, creating awareness about the center among residents, or just creating a sense of community among residents for the center, and building that sense of ownership, reaching out is very important. And impelling residents to action and getting them to participate in the center, whether it's as volunteers or simply as users of the services that centers might have to offer to the residents, it's very important.

And with that in the background, I want to go ahead and share with you what we have learned in researching strategies to engage residents of low-income communities, specifically in volunteer action and other community activities.

One of the first things that we learned from our work is that it is really important for organizations that seek to engage residents to understand the community in question. Whether you are an external agency or even if you are located within the community, it's very important to understand the community, understand the needs and realities for community residents. We're talking about speaking the language. For instance, if you are in a community that has a large population of Spanish speakers or English as a second language speakers, it's very important that you speak that language. But even so, talking about language means speaking about participation in a way that makes sense to the residents. So instead of saying, "Hey, I have this service to offer," you might consider what makes more sense. And that means really understanding and reaching out to the residents and talking to

people and others in the community.

The second strategy that we have identified is overcoming barriers to community involvement. If we're talking about residents whose reality is a lot of times dictated by not having enough income or being under-resourced from families, then barriers such as access to child care, even issues such as self-confidence, can be real barriers when we're talking about being engaged in the community. Similarly time. When people are working several jobs, it becomes very hard for residents to make the time to come and use the service or even volunteer in the community. So those are fundamental things that one needs to take care of. And also, if we are rigid and offer our services or offer opportunities to volunteers only in a very strict timeframe, if people have to work several jobs, that becomes really very difficult. So it's important for the centers to understand those barriers, and create flexible opportunities for residents to participate in community activities. One of the barriers is having the confidence in their center, and not knowing what the center is about, and building that relationship. So assigning a staff that is passionate about working with the community is very important. And also helping residents realize their skills and talents becomes very fundamental.

The third strategy that we have identified in increasing participation is empowering the community. This calls for helping residents own the issue as well as the solution. So, for Neighborhood Network centers, this might mean helping residents understand – or articulate what their needs are in terms of what kind of programming would help increase participation in terms of helping meet needs. So, doing an asset inventory or a needs assessment becomes fundamental. And I know that Sharon Glenn is going to be speaking more about this. Creating opportunities for residents to own the issues and develop solutions also means showing the benefit of that involvement. What do they gain out of it? How do you communicate that kind of benefit to the residents?

Engaging residents in the decision-making process whether you are developing programs or creating opportunities for involvement as volunteers within the program in the center. So if you have a computer class that you are offering, but you have learned that people have these barriers of childcare, maybe you're creating opportunities, asking residents, if you had a group meeting or a community meeting, asking residents for solutions, and they might be able to provide solutions. Like, some people might be able to

volunteer and create a child care co-op while other parents go and take advantage of the services such as the classes that you are offering. And also mobilizing residents around issues that impact them. Again, this calls for really finding out and learning about the community, doing the assessment, and talking to people and understanding the issues.

The fourth strategy that we have uncovered in our work is cultivating community member skills and talents. That calls for acknowledging and building on existing community assets. This means helping members identify their own skills and talents, allowing residents to have a real role in what the community does, or what kind of activities you have in the centers, and what kind of programming you have. And using those community members' skills and talents in creating those opportunities. Using the community members' skills and talents as a point of developing where you might be able to use their skills and talents and volunteers, but also as a starting point for them to build their own skills and talents for future employability. Encouraging residents to plan and lead projects and activities within the center. And allowing a relationship between resident skills and projects, showing the relationship between skills that residents have and the skills that they already have, and the services that you might be able to provide. Again, here the idea of needs assessment and doing skills and asset inventory becomes really important. I'm not sure if you're familiar with John McKnight and the work that he has done in terms of asset inventories. There's a really good resource online from Northwestern University's Asset Based Community Development Institute. It has a lot of resources. So if you have an opportunity to check that out online, I would encourage you to do that.

The fifth concept that we have uncovered in terms of increasing participation of residents in community activities is strengthening community leadership. And Sharon just mentioned – we were talking about it, and we were talking about the importance of community leadership. One of the fundamental things we've learned is that oftentimes residents of low-income communities don't feel that they have something to offer. Even external agencies often don't recognize the immense talent and skills that they have among themselves, among the residents, but also in the leaders. Developing those leadership skills within the community becomes very important for centers if you want to use the kind of

credibility and access that these leaders might have to get more participants, more residents, involved in your center's activities. So cultivating leadership means building the internal capacity of community members to lead and engage in community activities. Whether it is looking for resources externally, for training opportunities, or whether it means working with a resident one-on-one to coach and mentor the resident to take leadership within the center and the community, it becomes very important to be able to do that.

The sixth and very important finding we have had in terms of engaging residents is acknowledging that resident participation in community activities is really an exchange. We're talking about a population oftentimes with lots of barriers and challenges that one has to face. And if there is not a direct link between the life and issues that are a priority and what you are being asked to do in the community, there's not going to be that kind of participation and engagement in the activities. So being able to communicate that there is a value, and showing that there is value in participating, and that giving your time in coming to the center becomes really important. This means developing mechanisms for residents to receive tangible outcomes and benefits, and being able to communicate that and say if you come in, this is what you get. You can build skills this way. You can learn about certain services that might be in your community. So that idea of exchange and getting direct benefits becomes really important, and a benefit that makes sense to the residents. Oftentimes we've heard about giving benefits such as engaging people by providing food, providing opportunities to gain credit. For instance, if you have a child care collective, if people come in and give their time, either as a participant or a volunteer, then in return they're able to get these benefits. And especially if you're working with external organizations and businesses in your community, and you're able to bring those sort of benefits to the community that the residents then can tap into such as we have had communities and centers – programs where people have – the center directors or the non-profit has had a partnership with a business, and the business in turn has given either some goods or some retail credit to the non-profit which in turn they can use as incentives for residents to be engaged in the program. And that's another way of increasing participation.

Finally, the idea, the last and one of the foremost ideas is insuring

community readiness to be engaged in community activities. That really calls for going back and looking at all the stuff that we have talked about so far from understanding the community, to addressing barriers, to looking at how you are empowering the community and building skills and talents, and building the leadership, and also showing value in giving incentives to residents to be involved in community activities. It really is about residents need to be united. They need to see the services that you're programming, that you giving, and priority issues, that it reflects their priorities. And leaders need to be committed as well and sort of the spokesperson, and that means you have done a lot of work in building those relationships, but also communicating value and listened to residents in terms of their needs, and that is reflected in the programming. That means you really addressed the issue of whether or not the community is ready to be engaged.

Going back to the issue of – I'm not going to take a whole lot of time more because I know others are also going to be speaking, and we have a question and answer session. So I'm going to wrap up by saying one of the crucial things again is really understanding the community and doing the assessment and inventories necessary to see what are the skills and talents that people have, what their needs are, and then developing an outreach strategy based on those, as well as some of the strategies that I have outlined in addressing the barriers, and also building the skills of residents. Thank you.

Ms. Schachter: Thank you, Bandana.

Ms. Glenn: Thank you, Bandana. Well, I think you pretty much covered my job so I don't have to do anything, right, Vickie.

Ms. Schachter: Wrong!

Ms. Glenn: Going back to what Bandana talked about, I would like to reiterate impelling residents to action. We find that when residents are impelled, it builds esteem and confidence; it increases education and skills, and helps those residents to overcome barriers that they are facing that Bandana has discussed earlier. It also allows the residents to be able to see the benefit of their involvement because they are engaged in decision-making processes and in program development.



Today, I would like to discuss some proven methods that we have used, and I'm sure that some of you have been successful in using these methods to increase resident participation. First and foremost, we have to recognize that residents are key to the center's success. And a needs assessment must be performed to obtain resident needs, interests, and existing skills. The benefits of performing a needs assessment are that the information gathered from the residents provides a strong basis for program planning, and helps the planner to establish priorities and goals as well as identify resources. Oftentimes, when a needs assessment is performed, we generally seek out common needs and interests in order to develop basic programs. But a true assessment includes obtaining information from the residents that will lead to their direct contribution. In a needs assessment, we should not only obtain the needs and interests, but also what are the assets of those residents and the skills that they possess. And in that way we're showing them that they have something to offer to the success of the program, and this makes them feel valued, and they will later take ownership in future developments. Because most times we learn in discussions, and when we're talking to the residents that some of them have individual gifts that they've gained through experience, education and/or knowledge that we would not have been able to get just by them filling out a form and turning it back.

Now there are several ways in which to assess resident needs, interests, skills and assets. The most familiar method that I'm sure most of you are familiar with is a survey. We find that the surveys are great instruments to use, but oftentimes we come to rely on them too much, mainly because it's easy to leave a survey at a person's door and expect them to fill it out and return their results. But most of us have come to realize that in the environment that we work in, leaving surveys at the doors has become the least effective tool, primarily because most of the residents have barriers such as education and language that would require them to complete the surveys. But when we take those surveys and we take an individual who is able to either sit down or take time with the resident to complete the form that makes a more effective tool of that survey.

Another method to use is focus groups. And I generally like to do focus groups because they're very informative because you're able to gather at least eight residents together, and they can discuss their

needs, challenges, interests, skills and assets. And most times you either gather persons of common interests or you gather a variety of a group, and that way each individual is able to discuss what they feel would be beneficial to them that the Neighborhood Network center could offer.

Another method is resident meetings. This can be effective if monitored, and the goals and objectives are discussed up front. Then there are informal polls and interviews that are done while canvassing the property, or through informal discussions as you meet individuals in the center, or at rental offices, or in other settings that would allow for them to be able to discuss what it is that they would like to see offered at the Neighborhood Network Center.

Now I would suggest that we use a variety of those methods because, first, it keeps it challenging. And then secondly, it helps keep your programming needs updated. And this is also an effective way of evaluating the effectiveness of your programs when you're using a variety of those methods.

When doing a needs assessment we should look at doing them regularly. We do promote that assessments be done on an annual basis. Once again, this helps to keep your programming updated and, of course, evaluating the effectiveness of those programs. Also, when you're developing responsive programs through the data that you found through your needs assessment, it allows you to be able to collaborate with other community organizations that you identify through the information that you gain from residents or other individuals, and that will in turn bring those resources into the use of the residents. And nine times out of ten, the residents have more information to give based on community organizations than what we do as center directors or center staff. So getting that information through their assessment is very beneficial.

Going into program development, once we've done the needs assessment then we look at developing the programs. And what we do when we develop the programs, if we are including residents, we are impelling them to action by ownership. By involving residents we can include them in brainstorming sessions, encourage them to participate in partnership meetings, promote resident councils, and encourage volunteerism. That is another step of impelling residents through program development.

I'm not going to talk very long because I'd like to be able to get information from one of the center directors that we have on the line who has used proven methods and strategies which can be shared with the audience on what she's done to gather residents. She has a very high participation level. So I'm going to right now turn it over to Kim Timms. And this way it will allow more time for her to speak as a proven factor, and also allow for more questions and answers as they come about. Thank you.

Ms. Timms:

Good afternoon. Thank you, Ms. Sharon. One of the things as far as gathering resident participation, like Sharon said, a good thing is following up with your evaluation, your survey, and getting some of them back. Sometimes people do leave them on the doors or just toss them to the side, but I found it more effective if at the bottom you put a deadline, a week of them being out, making sure they get them back, to give them gift cards. Or also you do a survey every year so you know what's changed, who moved into the neighborhood, what are they likely to bring into the center. Putting things into the community center that they will like to do, for instance, day care, mothers night out, father support group, book rap sessions, things they want to see. That will make the center very successful, getting ideas from the residents and giving them something back. They always like to be given things back in return. They don't mind doing things for you, but they do like to feel some support. You give them some support as far as getting your information back in.

Having a lot of different activities, programs to go on, whether it is during the week, once a week, or once every other week, or even twice every month. Getting them involved on things basically that they have put back on the survey, whether it's teen outreach, senior program, sexual abuse class referrals, mother support groups and father support groups. Now one of the strongest groups around at the community center is the mothers support group because they're there from the age of 14 on up. They come out and give each other support from mother support on, whether it be wellness, fitness, education, household, how to clean their apartments, even helping them out by filling out applications, whatever they need to do in a timely manner to the management office. So the mother support group is very strong. And then again the father support group is also. And everything that you set up in your community center towards getting people involved, let

them take initiative. They put that on their survey, that's what they want to do. Finding out, asking all who wants to be – ask them which one wants to be like the director of it or resident advisor over it. One of the persons in the neighborhood – how you pick the ones out is the one who's come back and given you all the information, what's going on in the neighborhood. Let that person be the person to kind of oversee the meetings, getting them started. And the most important thing is they're probably going to be self-sufficient of any program that you have going on in the center. Helping them out once they've established the meeting, put some food out there for them or whatever they need. That's what the director is offering them. If they need more flyers, if they need a bingo night out, go out and buy the things that they need. And then sit back and let them kind of take over on the meetings and getting involved. They go door to door getting more people to respond to the meetings. And sometimes they'll also do your surveys for you. And basically you just have to type it up, but they kind of go out there and get their own survey, asking things from door to door.

And the rewards are for them to take leadership. They like to take the leadership. They like to take initiative. They start coming back asking you, can we have this? Can we do that? We like to have our bingo every Monday night. We put a calendar together, can you type it and print it up. We need some extra copies. So then you know that your center is going into a self-sufficient mode. You really don't have to look for people to come in and do certain different things because they have taken that initiative. And you get more and more volunteers. Sometimes you can't just ask them to be a volunteer. It kind of takes them off guard. Say "I need you to hold a meeting." "I need you to do after school tutoring with the kids." They'll show up. "I need you to go ahead and bake cookies, have a bake sale." Even if they don't know how to do it, never say what they can't do. It's always giving them encouragement. Tell them they can do it. And then if they need that little – even if they don't like it, say, "It's okay, it's okay. It will be the next time." It will be a little bit better. Then take it one step at a time. They get involved. They ask the next-door neighbor, "Can you come help me do this?" You don't have to do too much for them. They start taking over. They start coming in to the community center. "Do you need me to do this?" "Do you need me to do that?" Or, "Could I help you out with that?" Then they feel the ownership of this community center. They know the

center is there for them. It's part of their residence and they know it's for them. You don't have to do anything else, but just kind of be their guidance. Then start giving out awards for everything they do, even at the residents meeting, even for the surveys. Give them a certificate, give them something to show that you appreciate them because without them, it wouldn't be possible. The center couldn't progress to the next level. Then going out and bring in different speakers, whether it be for housing, whether it be for credit repair. It lets them know that, okay, they're taking the initiative to help me better myself, and I'm going to take the time to learn that, to figure out what are the opportunities out there that I have sat back and withheld myself from. And they'll start getting more involved. They'll tell somebody, not just in their community, someone at their church, and then it will start going on. Then you start getting people coming from everywhere who want to know what is going on at this center that I haven't heard about. It's not happening in my community, but it's happening at the small multifamily community center. What is actually going on? What keeps this center growing? It's a close bond.

You have to get the residents to feel that they are needed, they are somebody. Their ideas, the things that they want to do, really mean something. Asking a resident, "Can you come read a book to the kids after school?" "Can you come in to help with this process or do some paper filing work in the community center resource room?" Let them feel needed. Everyone likes to feel needed. And then again, it's not asking them. They like to be told. They like to be just needed, just to feel the close bond. Doing coffee and doughnuts in the morning. Every now and then, just kind of have a spread for them to come in. Once a month, give everybody a birthday. Just have a big cake. Give everybody a birthday party. The more you do for them – it's not about the time, it's not about the money, it's the close bond. Show them it's okay. Walk the neighborhood; get to know the people in the neighborhood, whether it is your seniors, the teenagers, or the kids. Get out there, kind of be involved with them, and sit down. Sometimes you do get busy in the office, but sitting down, taking the time to listen to what they have to say about their neighborhood or their needs, you will find out that the residents will be more involved. Then they'll want to be in your programs, your early literacy program, and your second language program. And once they figure out about the job market – "Can you teach me how to get on the computer?" Once you get that one person, that one person is your mouthpiece. They

tell other people. They bring the people into the center; start teaching them how to get on the computer. What they feel that they can't do, they will do. You have to let them know they are important. Their needs are as important as yours. Get them enthusiastic about the community center. Show them some type of loyalty. And you have to be – first and foremost, you've got to be trustworthy. You have to be truthful. Being honest, talking to them, letting them know if you've got a grant. This is what the grant would do. It might be something that we might think is not important that we would probably keep in the background, but that is important. "I've got a grant. It's about this. This could help us if we just all stick in here together."

Trustworthy, keeping the faith and promptly letting them know that without this, this center can't progress without you. I can't get to the next level without you. You are a very important person. Being positive, speaking positive about anything and everything that happens at your community center, at your learning center if you have an open mind. It's not what you can't do; it's what I can do. The same thing about the residents. Keep the doors open; revolve them constantly. Whenever they come in, having a newspaper there, spending time to socialize with them. Sometimes you do get busy, but say whatever you have to say, "Whatever you want to do is very important to me because without you, without this community, without your kids, nothing would take place."

I can't stress enough about the center because I've had this idea for years - this idea of listening, understanding their needs. I can't even do my GED class if I can't listen to what they're saying. I can't bring in a teacher if I don't hear what they're saying. I bring in a teacher to cultivate, elevate them, get them to the level they need to be. First of all, it's about trust, the communication bond. Once they understand and they trust me and I trust them, they know "Okay, I can go into this class. I'll let my kids go here. We're going to utilize this center until there is no end." Trust factor. Keeping open doors, communication. You have any and everything that you want, and that increases the volume of your volunteers. Giving them a sense that they own their community center.

Ms. Glenn:

Thank you, Kim. One of the things that I'd like to reiterate that Kim stated, and it's a very important factor, is building the trust. Once you build the trust or like most people like to say, you build

it, they will come. Well, building the trust and they will come. I had the opportunity of going to a seminar this past summer, and one of the speakers stated something that Kim said, that if you take the time to listen to the residents, you never know what effect you will have on that resident's future. So thank you very much, Kim, for providing that insight to us. And I'll turn this back over to Vickie for the question and answer session.

Ms. Schachter:

Thank you. Thank you very much. Kim, I was also moved by what you said, and I want to reiterate that you said, "never say what they cannot do." Having worked in the nonprofit field with community based organizations for most of my life, I think back on some of the things that have been said to people who have felt disenfranchised and unempowered, and how they were not valued, and how they were not encouraged. But professionals such as myself had an opportunity to at least feel good. And I say that with great irony because it's only been over time that the empowerment movement and things like asset building community development have emerged as a result of some of the failures in the field of social service and human services, and the inability to meet unmet needs by those of us who really – our intention was to do that, but we fumbled around and we did not do it well.

Tina, I would like to now start our question and answer period.

Operator:

At this time I would like to remind everyone, in order to ask a question, please press star, then the number one on your telephone keypad. We'll pause for just a moment to compile the Q&A roster. There are no questions at this time.

Ms. Schachter:

Well, I have a question for Kimberly. Could you perhaps explain to our listeners some of the events that you hold, such as team building or leadership development events - ways to get people to participate, at least on a first time basis? Do you do any center wide activities?

Ms. Timms:

Where do I start there? Actually one of the things I like to do is send out a Welcome Letter to every new resident that moves into the multifamily - because it's three different HUD apartment complexes that are serviced here. I normally send Welcome Letters to the apartments when they have new tenants moving in. And also give them a calendar of events of what's going on for that month and the upcoming months. I always put out different flyers,

pass them out, making sure the kids take them home in the afternoon. So we have a lot of advertisements there for them. And one thing about it is the mothers support group is a real strong kind of support group as is the fathers support group. Because one thing I found out about when I started implementing that is I learned myself in the last four and a half years that they have a lot to talk about things they like to see and do. And they talk about their need for help as far as their teenagers going to school, not going to school, making them clean up, do their chores. Listen to that and also as far as not looking for a job. They can't find a job. How to get back into the job market or even they don't have enough food. How to manage their money. So once you get a lot of women together from the ages 14 and on up, a lot of the older people say, "I budget this way. I did this in the past. This is what I'm doing. I heard about a job here." It's like a rap session. Open it up and we share different ideas. It seems to kind of work out. And one thing about it, when the new tenants move in, whether it be the females or the males, or some of the seniors, the manager also encourages them all to come out to one of the mothers support groups or resident meetings. Because at the resident meetings it's open and they all kind of share ideas about the apartment as far as security, and what they would like to do. We always do the birthday every month. Whoever's birthday is in the month, from whatever apartment complex, everyone in the month of April we'll celebrate with a birthday cake. And we buy cakes, and we give out gifts to everybody who comes to the resident meeting for that month. And they seem to like that. And that's one thing about it they don't want to miss. And they share different ideas. And a lot of the residents are seniors, they like to do different things. So the seniors like to go door to door and welcome the young to the old into the neighborhood. And they encourage them to come to the center for whatever they need. They might need clothes and food.

Doing different things - I notice special awards for the kids. Everyone's report cards, A and B. Take them to the movies. Even in the mothers support group and the fathers support group, take them to a movie. They might not have the money or transportation to get to a movie. You could have movies night out, family night out. They look for those things. And that's what's keeping them involved. That's what is coming back and forth to the center, getting a resident to kind of stay involved. And also connecting with every kind of aspect out there because you're building up the



volunteer bases. Connecting with your workforce, your unemployment office. Also connecting with some of your local colleges, schools and teachers. A lot of people nowadays have a lot of internships to do, and that increases your volunteer level. So once you get them to volunteer and they interact with the people in the community, they tell people. So it's a never-ending cycle. And everyone has different ideas of sharing and how to get people involved. I just kind of basically sit back and listen, and help them. Whatever their need is, I try to fulfill it, whatever I can give. I pray about it and it comes.

Ms. Schachter: That was wonderful. Tina, do we have any questions?

Operator: Yes, ma'am. You have a question from Sonya Knight. Sonya, your line is open. [NO RESPONSE] We'll proceed to the next question. Your next question comes from Beth Piersma.

Ms. Piersma: Are you ready?

Responses: Yes.

Ms. Piersma: I have a question about resident involvement. I have food at my meetings and stuff like that. We have - almost 50% of our residents are college students, and the other half is disabled. We have a handful of elderly. And I'm having a really hard time with attendance. I have speakers come in, just a lot of things. And I've offered them lottery tickets, and that's actually been the best thing so far. I'll have food out there and stuff. I've tried to get resident surveys out and get feedback and stuff like that, and I've just really, really had a tough time getting them to actually show up. And I know that kind of encompasses the whole thing we've talked about, but I just don't know what to do to get them down here.

Ms. Glenn: Beth, you said you have 50% college students?

Ms. Piersma: Yes.

Ms. Glenn: Have you approached any of those college students to be able to maybe provide classes or serve as interns?

Ms. Piersma: Yes, I've talked with some of them about volunteering and things like that, and most of them just don't want to be bothered.

Ms. Timms: Let me jump in on that point. Basically what I did as far as using some of the college students was write them a letter to the different organizations at the college. My first interns that came on, because I get them each semester, were from the nurses association. They had internships to do. Then I finally started getting teachers. So they have to come and volunteer in order to get their credits and everything. And therefore they kind of went out. They came in and asked me what did I want to do, what did I need to see the community for involved into the center. Basically at that point myself being – I think one of the things, being in some marketing kind of field and advertising, I knew all the little strategies and tricks to do to advertise to people. But I told them, just more participation. See who is out there who I haven't touched, a person I haven't got to? See what they need. If they can't come to me, see how I can come to them, or what can I bring to them in order just to have a phone call. Because I do get phone calls. You do have some seniors who just can't make it to the center. They don't want to get in an automobile. So you send your volunteers out there to always check on them, and kind of connect. But basically I kind of went out – after the interns went out, they said, "Ms. Timms, they want to see you, they want to figure out what else is going on in the center." So I started going door to door myself personally. I asked them, "What can I, as a director, a leader, do for you? What can I do for you in your individual need basis? What is it that you need for me to do for you?" I don't care if it's some food, I don't care if it's some clothing. "What is it that you need to make you stay here or to be involved in the community or in the center? What can I offer to you?" And about that time, when it's open and they see that you're sincere, they'll get to the point where they'll tell you about it. They'll kind of open up and start talking to you.

Ms. Piersma: Okay.

Ms. Glenn: And, Beth, also, what is the time factor in which your center is open because of the students being in class and what not?

Ms. Piersma: Well, the computer lab is in my office, and I'm the service coordinator in the building. So I'm here from 9:00 to 5:00. And I'm just trying to draw them in at any time. Not even necessarily for the computer lab, but for anything.

Ms. Shrestha: I think I would agree as Kimberly has spoken so wonderfully about

the various strategies she's used. But also going back to what Sharon had talked about assessments and finding out what the community wants, this idea of sort of reaching out and seeing what their motivations might be. For college students, something fun, something more social oriented might be a way of attracting people. But also keeping an eye on, like Sharon has said, the timeframe. A lot of them probably have classes during the daytime. So have you considered the weekend or in the evenings. And if you have volunteers engaged and the students engaged as volunteers. And if they're reaching out, that might also be a way of getting –

Ms. Piersma: I tried that, but my volunteer ended up sitting here by himself for a couple of hours every time. And he was like, "I don't want to keep doing it."

Ms. Glenn: Have you used that volunteer to, like Kim said, go out and meet with those ones who can't get to the center?

Ms. Piersma: Yes. And a lot of my outreach is actually away from the college students and towards the disabled residents, and trying to encourage that kind of thing. But attendance has just been so difficult. I bribe them. I ask them what do you want to talk about, what can I put out here for you, how can I help you, and there's just a lot of people that are just like – I don't want to be bothered. You won't do anything anyway. That's been their history. I'm like – well, I can't help you if I don't know what you need.

Ms. Glenn: That's one of the problems that is being faced, and that's the trust factor and being consistent with them that's most important. They won't get involved until they see a consistency. They won't get involved until they see other people getting out there and getting involved, and then they want to know.

As far as the college students, I'm going back to them again, Beth, if you don't mind. Have you done – and I know we do some kind of lottery where we try to do a social event or something like that, but have you thought of a type of social event like de-stress after exam night or something like that for them?

Ms. Piersma: That's a good idea.

Ms. Glenn: That could possibly get them in. And once you get them in, then

it's like it's all sales for you. It's all marketing for you.

Ms. Piersma: Right.

Ms. Glenn: This is why I need you. And because of the fact that the Neighborhood Networks is such a feel good project, one of them, you can touch their heart one way or the other.

Ms. Piersma: Somebody. There's got to be one.

Ms. Timms: And another thing, using the college, if you get with the teachers, they have different semesters to go through. Because once I sent a letter and also did a letter in the local college paper. And also they have marketing reps at the colleges too. And basically when you get that teacher in there, then the teachers start coming. Because my interns came – one semester they came every Monday for like three hours, and the other one came – the second semester they came every Friday. But it was a class project. And the first semester I had six, the second students came and I had ten. So they had a strategy thing they had to do. And the last session I just had this past summer, they implemented on – the residents did a survey from the first class. That was a good thing. The residents did a survey and they said they wanted a day care center in the community center. And I'm thinking, God, that's a lot to do. And I said, "Okay, well, go ahead and assess the needs of the community." So the students did. And they said, "Ms. Timms, these are all our surveys." On the survey they looked for things for income and health and all kinds of stuff. And that was one of the things that stuck out with the students was building a day care center in the community center.

Ms. Piersma: Okay.

Ms. Timms: So the students kind of got all that involved, and so now they opened up a day care center in our community center.

Ms. Piersma: Okay.

Ms. Schachter: That's great.

Ms. Glenn: Beth, you're from Stuyvesant, right?

Ms. Piersma: Yes, Stuyvesant.

Ms. Glenn: We are providing remote technical assistance. Hopefully, we'll be able to help you to overcome that problem through remote technical assistance.

Ms. Piersma: Okay. Thank you.

Ms. Glenn: Thank you.

Operator: Your next question comes from Camilla McPherson. One moment.

Ms. McPherson: About the fathers support group and the mothers support group - what are some of the things that you're doing?

Ms. Timms: In the mother support group and the father support group?

Ms. McPherson: Yes.

Ms. Timms: One of the things in the mothers support group is in the community that I'm serving – I found out just in my surveys alone from some of the students that I had a lot of teenage mothers at the age of 14. And out of the 10 that I did find out about, I would say 5 of them were on their third baby. They didn't have any mother support skills and didn't know about obstacles and the things that they would face, and what all they have to do as far as making decisions. And some of them had dropped out of school. The one thing about the mothers support group, I think my oldest mother is 98. So she shared different ideas of things back in her day, and how things are now. And also shared ideas of how to bring up a child. So we kind of interact on different things like that. And then if they want to, look for jobs that bring in people from different jobs that are hiring or a temporary service to come in and they talk about getting into the workforce. And a lot of things that I do – one thing about – I being a single mom myself, I also look for people who are out there in the job market to learn to work with these families, and these mothers to understand I do have kids, and they need to be flexible around their work schedule because of their kids. They have kids in school or they're working with kids with disability needs, so some don't need to be working full-time. So I bring in different speakers and also give them rewards for just participating in those meetings every other Wednesday. That's why I go out and take them to the movies, or I

have a chef come in and cook them a nice dinner. Figure out what they want to do the next time. What would they like for me to do to reward them? And they do that.

The father support group is very strong. They kind of initiate their own thing. They just let me know what's going on. And they educate the boys. In the father support group they have baseball going on. Two months ago we got a motorcycle club started up out of the father support group. They go to the zoo on Father's Day, Father's Day banquets. They do Mother's Day banquets. So now they let me know. I type it up and I advertise. But it's so strong. And they kind of correspond. And one thing about it, it does not mean that they have to live on your property. They can really come from anywhere. I don't care if they've got a boyfriend, a girlfriend; they're not legally married. He's supporting you. There's all kinds of life skills that are taught in both the mother and father support groups. And they kind of – sometimes at the end of the month what we do is both groups get together and we discuss different things. And it has really come about. I can successfully say I have helped people to move out of the apartment, step out on faith, and buy their own home with closing costs of 63 cents. Get a husband and wife back together, a boyfriend to marry his wife after they've lived together for five or six years. It's just the idea of that close bond.

Ms. Schachter:

Thank you, Kim.

Operator:

Thank you. Your next question comes from Michelle Shorter.

Ms. Shorter:

Hi. What type of information should be included in the needs assessment?

Ms. Glenn:

Your needs assessment can be customized to your community *per se*. If you have – if your community demographics are Hispanic, 95% Hispanic and 5% Caucasian, then your needs assessment can be customized to what is it that can help that Hispanic population and that Caucasian population. Some of the things that we look at are what skills they have, what is their employability, what is their previous employment or history, and things of that nature. So it's a customization as far as how do you want to design your program.

Ms. Schachter:

You could also look on the START online business plan tool, which is on our website, [www.neighborhoodnetworks.org](http://www.neighborhoodnetworks.org), and

take a look at the sample resident survey, as well as the resource material that is attached as a PDF document.

Ms. Shorter: Okay.

Ms. Schachter: There's a section on surveying your residents. And see if there's anything there that can help you to design and customize, as Sharon said, design and customize for your community an assessment instrument that will capture the types of information that will be helpful. Also, you can call any of us here on the TA information line and ask for suggestions or perhaps samples of other centers' surveys.

Ms. Shorter: Thank you.

Ms. Schachter: Thank you, Ms. Shorter.

Operator: Your next question comes from Marla Roy.

Ms. Roy: I just wanted to piggyback on what the young lady was saying regarding a property with a lot of college students. I have a property like that. And one of the things that I do is I have to capitalize on social events to get them out. And so I'll do things that ordinarily would not happen on our site, but I fix them so that they do happen here.

Ms. Glenn: And then do you take those social programs and use them to give back to the center?

Ms. Roy: I do. For instance, if I have – I may do a non-alcoholic happy hour. But during the happy hour, I might use that time to promote a financial seminar that we might be having, which I know people in that age bracket would be interested in. And then I make sure that the financial information that I'm giving them would be comparable to their lifestyle. I wouldn't have someone come in and talk about giving to the stock market. I may have someone come in and talk about setting up an IRA account with \$20.00 per month, something like that. So you have to keep in mind your audience, and just try and drive a lot of social activities for that kind of group.

Ms. Glenn: Thank you Ms. Roy. That sounds great. I'm sure Beth could use that information.

Operator: There are no further – I'm sorry. You have a question from Camilla McPherson.

Ms. McPherson: Yes, I would like to know – we have residents here also that are elderly, that really can't – like in the 80's and really can't go to the laundry – to wash their clothes anymore or really do any heavy duty housecleaning. Do you have any suggestions how we could accommodate the elderly?

Ms. Timms: I guess I'll jump in on that one. Basically how do you help some of the ones that can't get out? I set up a teen program. And I have a program, a grandparent adopting a youth. And so some of the youth that are adopted throughout the community center, they have to make sure it's not their own grandparent. So they kind of check their mailbox, take their trash, clean up their apartment for them. But then again, I also establish a bond with one of the local health home services agency. So what I did because I want to keep up with my seniors and make sure they have everything they need. So some of the seniors and some of my volunteers that come to the programs at the center, they even go out to the residents' house, the seniors, cook their food, take their trash out if the kids are at school. So I do use older people to go out and kind of work with the seniors to keep up on that. But you have your local home health agency. If you establish a good relationship with them, they will send volunteers. Also, my thing is always open up doors for opportunities for jobs. If you connect with a home health agency, some of your volunteers, get them to be house sitters, home health aides, sitters and things, they will pay them to keep up on your residents.

Ms. McPherson: Okay.

Ms. Schachter: Thank you.

Operator: There are no further questions.

Ms. Schachter: Okay. Thank you so much. At this time I would like to thank our speakers, Bandon Shrestha, Sharon Glenn and Kimberly Timms. I know that all three of our speakers had many other things they could be doing during the past hour, but they chose to spend that hour with us and impart some knowledge to us. I would also like to thank all of our callers for their excellent questions. And at this



time, this conference call is ended.

Operator: Thank you. This concludes today's conference. You may now disconnect.